



## Decimation in A-flat and D-minor - Configured for Live Piano

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Shipsides and Beggs Projects - DECIMATION in A-flat and F-minor LIVE PIANO

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Decimation in A-flat and F-minor - Configured for Live Piano  
 Shipsides and Beggs Projects - performed live by Caroline Scotton  
 36min  
 2018

After an intensive period of working, transcribing the midi data of the '[Decimation in A-flat and D-minor](#)' audio artwork to sheet music and arranging the composition for live performance it was then developed and performed live by professional French classical pianist Caroline Scotton-Goulard.

The event took place on the September 30th at La Cuisine Centre d'arte et de aesign, in France as the final phase of the Lament of the Accolade Tree exhibition by Shipsides and Beggs Projects in 2018.

Live audio documentation of this event is here:  
<https://vimeo.com/298460718>

35:19

Contextual information:





Original work: Decimation in A-flat and F-minor. 12inch specially commissioned vinyl record. 31mins. Edition of 4. 2018

A terrifying policy of the Italian Army in WW1 was that of Decimation, where one in ten soldiers were randomly selected and executed if any soldier in that section was thought guilty of cowardice. The audio work in the form of 12" record vinyl is played on a record player. It takes the elevation data of the 1916 Italian mountain frontier and transcodes it into musical partition, transforming that data into a topological sound piece. Configured for two pianos playing in chords A-flat and F-minor the work takes on a beautiful but haunting musical form.



A performance of this electronic work was developed for live recital by professional classical pianist Caroline Scotton-Goulard took place at the end of the exhibition (documentation within the link below).

More information and documentation on Decimation in A-flat and F-minor can be found here:

<http://www.danshipsides.com/DshipsidesWeb/DECIAF.html>

An excerpt of the audio work is here:

<https://vimeo.com/258876365>



### Three minutes of Decimation for two pianos in A Flat and F minor. Shipsides and Beggs Projects 2018

from **Neal Beggs**

03:05



Draft text:

Decimation in A-flat and F-minor is a work which has developed over several years, refining a process and developing a programming system and concept to a point where the project has reached a significant level of maturity and resolution.



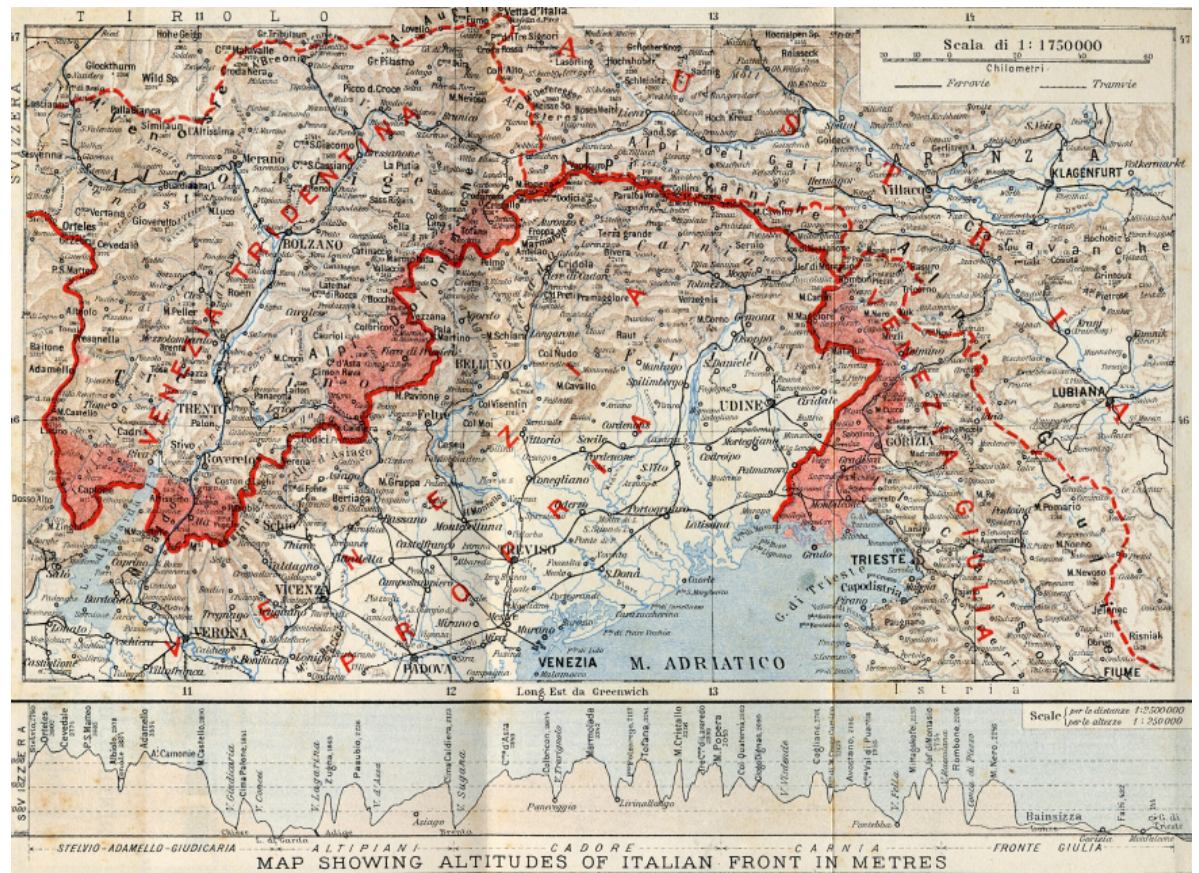


The principle is that of transcoding altitudinal height of geographic, topological and political partitions into audio data and then producing musical forms out of that data. Partially the concept developed through an association with the steel wires of Via Ferrata (tensioned metal cables and stemples introduced in WW1 as a way of industrially and militarily occupying the summits of that war frontier) and the metallic and potentially musical noise they make whilst climbing in the Dolomites and imagining what form of sound and music these literal partitions (these iron-lines in the landscape contributed to a significant historical partitioning of Europe) might constitute. The SBP work [BIVACCO](#) (2011) explored some aspects of this phenomenon.

The process has been developed through several stages and artworks. Neal prototyped the concept through a work *From Our House to the Summit of Europe* – which took a line from the summit of Mount Blanc to his house in northern France. We have also developed other works using the political partition of Belgium (some of which features in [Zombie Line](#) and in the exhibition at L'Orangerie, Bastonge, 2015) and that between France and Spain (performed at Pau at the Bel Ordinaire, 2016).

Often these partitions have developed in a way to facilitate live performance (with guitar, harmonica, melodica, drums, voice, electronic instruments and improvised wind instruments) which has allowed a level of flexibility and shift so as to accommodate vernacular or popular music as elements of the partition melody connect to or suggest – for instance in the Spanish - France partition *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* is present in the notation. The harmonies that emerge also allow us to fold in other songs including those of our own. A raw version of the Decimation concept was experimentally performed with guitar, drums, electronics and other instruments at Microclima in Venice in 2017 and makes up the spine of a series of edited videos of this performance called [THE IRON WAY](#) (this audio/video/performative work was originally called *Decimation in D* and was the basis of this matured work).

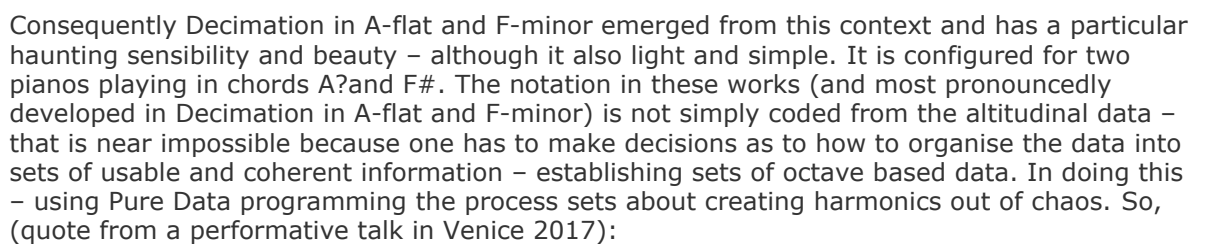
It is useful and important here to say that in French the word “partition” also refers to harmony in music in terms of how octaves are constructed and operate in relation to audio frequency – so the double meaning with geo-political partitioning is a useful tool into establishing a conceptual frame for this work.



Decimation in A-flat and F-minor derives its data from the Italian-Austrian frontier in 1916 where we climbed in phases of field research and encountered the WW1 histories which is still very much a present and, at times, ghostly phenomenon. In this war, the Italian army re-instituted the terrifying policy (it also was a system used in Roman times) of Decimation. Decimation is where one in ten soldiers could be randomly selected and executed if any soldier in that section was thought guilty of cowardice. In practice, it was routinely undertaken whether cowardice had been suspected of taking place or not. In this way, the army sought to establish and exploit unwavering obedience. In a way, it establishes the fascist dynamic of totalitarian brutality where the individual has no justice, value or autonomous agency. In this light, the mass of men was decimated without attention to specific or individual value, sense or what might in be the best interests of even the local war objective – and most definitely with no cognizance of the wider interests and potential of human relationships. Decimation as a term might be a way of also thinking of the fascistic indiscriminate relationship to the planet, environment, humanity, society and the individual that follows through much of western power and economic driven politics through the 20th Century and through to neo-liberalism today.

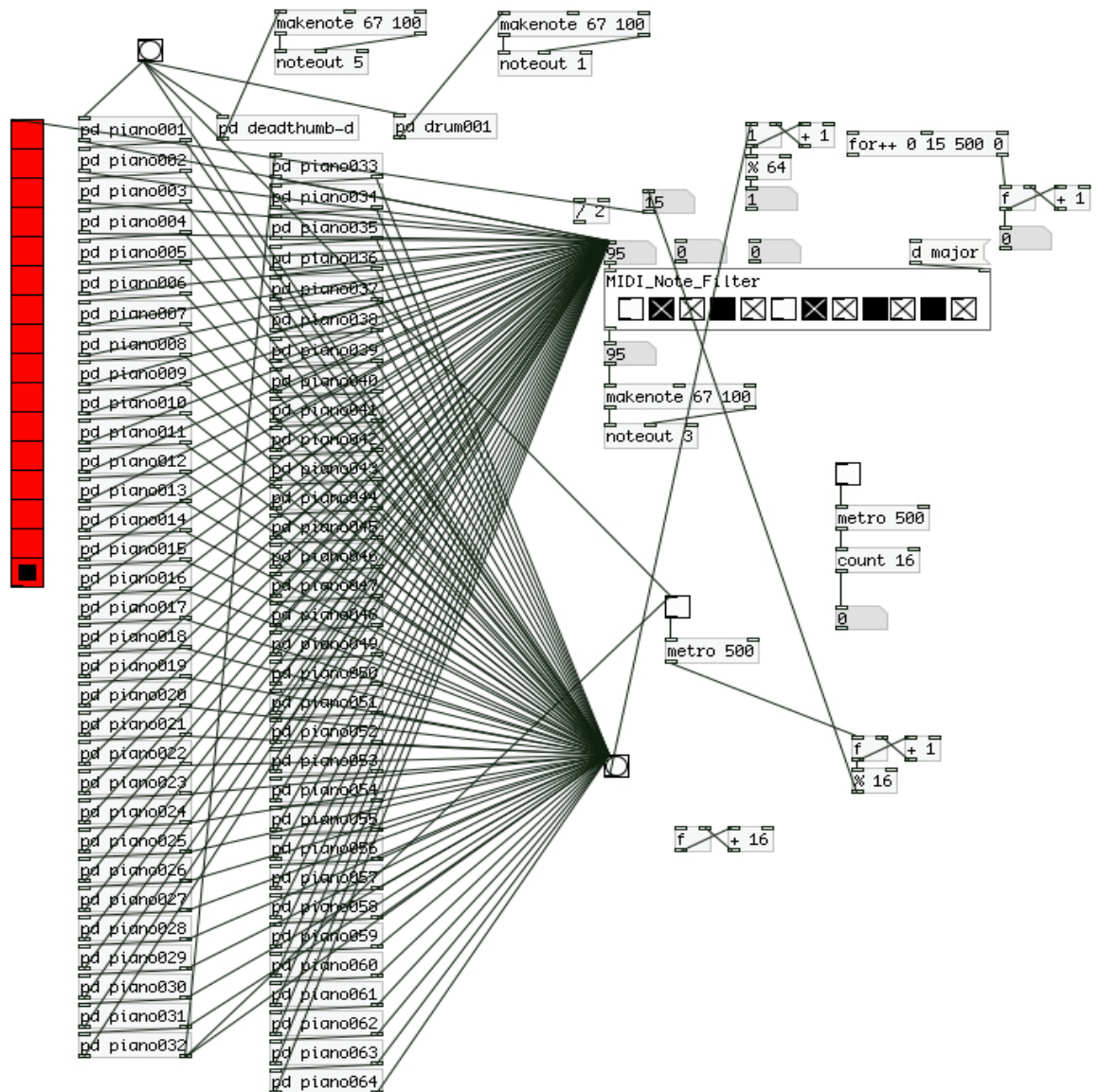
In this context, climbing in the Dolomites (as in many other climbing locations) brings a connection to global politics and the haunting nature of what much of its power dynamics are historically built on – brutal partition, decimation and exploitation.



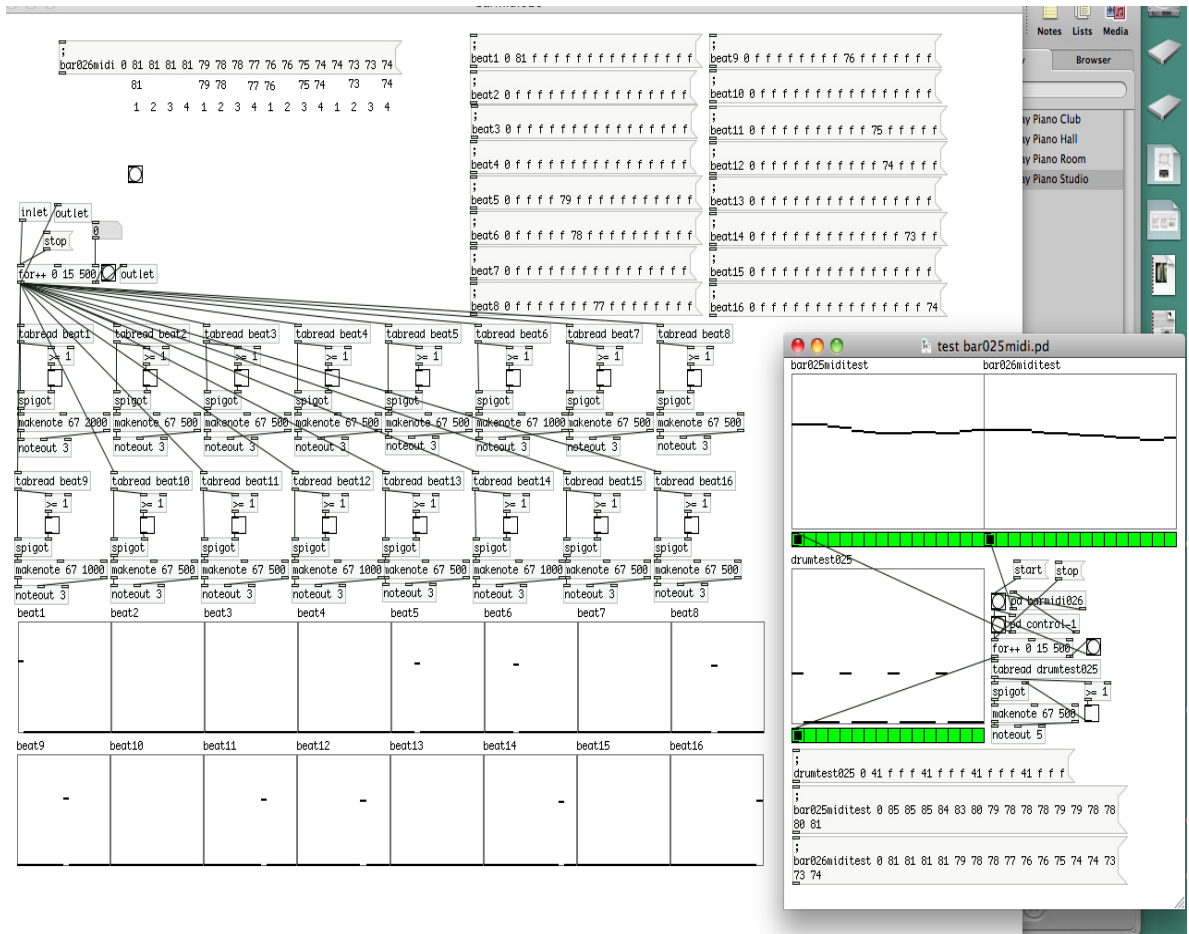


7/9





Graphically Pure Data allows information to be organised and made active visually – in patch-like sets. So, the sets of information establish a painstaking rigorous systemic flow between data faithful to the process undertaken from terrain mapping to music. There is a minute focus on details – making numbers active within a system in sets of patches – and a sense of establishing coherent harmonies within a mass of otherwise incoherent chaotic data. The system does not totalise the general idea but brings its' structure from the terrain and the need to set up harmonic patches. This might relate to Cezanne's landscape orientated approach to the "patch" where (we spoke about this in the conference in La Cuisine) he speaks of perceiving harmonies which are not made from blended total scenes but from patch against patch so that difference and juxtaposition exist as crucial elements.



This system of coding through Pure Data is worked by hand (Neal's hands) - this aspect is not computer derived or batch processed. Each piece of data is individually worked with and assigned a relationship within and to the partition. It is painstaking work – but this level of proximity and built-in nuance allows for the human quality of the electronically outputted work. This is why it sounds so much as though Decimation in A-flat and F-minor is actually played by a human pianist - and why to have it performed live then became the next logical and creative step.

The work exists in several forms:

as Pure Data electronic output audio data file

as a vinyl record pressed using the audio file

as transferred into music notation for live performance (first arranged and performed by Caroline Scotton Goulard La Cuisine in September 2018 - see above.)